

Easter 2A

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church

Lakeland, FL

April 16, 2023

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Psalm 15

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

Grace to you and peace from Jesus, the Risen One. Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

In the church year, this Sunday, the 2nd Sunday of Easter is often referred to as "Low Sunday". Many think that the name comes because our attendance is lower than what we experienced last Sunday. While that may be true, one can also see that this Sunday is "low" because we don't have all of the lilies, all of the music, all of the fanfare, all of the hoopla of last Sunday. All of that was "high" and so today we have the "low" Sunday. A Sunday in which we take a breath and take a look at all that has transpired and consider where we are in the midst of this. So whichever way you decide to look at it, the tradition in the Church is to call this "Low Sunday." And it happens every year.

And it also happens that every year on the second Sunday of Easter, we hear the story about Thomas, who Scripture tells us is called "the Twin" but that Every year we come together to hear the Christmas story and we marvel at the birth of the Baby Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of Luke. Every Pentecost we hear of the remarkable outpouring of the Holy Spirit as recorded in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. And every "Low Sunday" we hear the story of Thomas. What is it about this story that is so significant that the Church in her wisdom has appointed it to be read every single year?

So, this Gospel reading. The twentieth chapter of John recounts three resurrection appearances. The first is in the Garden when Jesus appears to Mary. She didn't recognize him and thought he was the gardener — until he called her by name. Mary. And she fell to her knees. The song I Come to the Garden Alone describes this:

I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses; And the voice I hear, falling on my
ear, The Son of God discloses.

Refrain:

And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own,

Thomas, now, is it?

And the joy we share as we tarry there, None other has ever known.

He speaks, and the sound of His voice

Is so sweet the birds hush their singing;

And the melody that He gave to me

Within my heart is ringing. [Refrain]

Maybe sometimes you've felt like Mary — having an astounding experience of Jesus' presence in your life or hearing him call your name and you knew immediately it was he. Or walking in a garden or a forest, his presence is unmistakably close. Yes, sometimes perhaps like Mary.

The second appearance is to the disciples, minus Thomas. The disciples were gathered together behind locked doors because they were afraid. Think about what that gathering might have been like — what might they be talking about? What to do? Should go back to fishing? Maybe they sat in silence still trying to take in what had happened. Maybe some feelings of despair and wondering how on earth this could happen — their hopes of freedom from Roman rule — dashed; their time in ministry with Jesus — vanished, never to be experienced again; life as they knew it — gone.

And into all of this, all of the questions and worrying and confusion came Jesus, amazingly appearing through the locked doors, into their midst speaking words of peace — Peace be with you, he said. Then he showed them his hands and his side and then the disciples rejoiced. And again he said to them, "Peace be with you."

Maybe sometimes you've felt like one of those disciples. Hunkered down, wrapped in fear, perhaps a life-changing time or event. And then Jesus comes and speaks a word of peace, indeed the gift of peace from the very source of peace.

And then we come to Thomas who was called the Twin. But of course, we know him as Doubting Thomas. And to be honest, I think he has gotten a bad wrap over the years. I mean, we don't call Peter "Denying Peter." We don't call Paul "Persecuting Paul." But Thomas, that is "Doubting Thomas" has even become part of our everyday speech — Don't be a Doubting Thomas. But to conclude that that is the meaning of this text is to miss so very much.

You can imagine what happened the day after Jesus appeared to the disciples. They may have run into Thomas at the local Home Depot — to check out the locks on those doors, you know. "Thomas! You can't imagine what we have seen. We have seen the

Can you imagine what Thomas's eye roll might have looked like? Perhaps you can hear the "Yeah, right," muttered under his breath. "No really, it was him. He is alive!" And Thomas responds, "Unless I see it for myself, unless I touch his hands and put my fingers in his side, unless I see I will not believe. It's just too preposterous."

Poor Thomas. He wasn't asking for anything special. He asked only to see what everyone else already had. No sanctimonious disciples here shaming Thomas. No, they surely knew that he was asking only for what they had already received.

Maybe sometimes we're just like Thomas, overcome with confusion, wracked with grief, feeling all alone in the world, a world turned upside down. Yes, sometimes I've been Thomas. You too?

So yes there was that first evening, as they were gathered and Thomas not with them. That first night Jesus appeared to them. And when they told Thomas the news, Thomas wondered, Thomas was skeptical, when Thomas could not believe the news -- THEN this is what Thomas did.. . .

He came back. Thomas came back to those huddled up, those behind closed doors, those who were fearful, those who were wondering. Carrying his own worries and angst, his own questions and despair, this one, this Thomas, he came back to those who loved him most. He didn't strike out on his own, forgetting those closest to him. He came back.

And then what did Jesus do? Jesus came once again into the midst of their gathering. "Peace be with you." He went right over to Thomas. "Behold here are my hands. Touch them. Here is my side. Touch it." And Thomas said, "My Lord and my God." Jesus didn't scold. He didn't chastise. Jesus said, "Here I am. For you."

So, Mary, the disciples, and Thomas. Which are you most like? Sometimes one and sometimes another. Know this. Jesus is raised from the dead and made himself known to them regardless of their individual reactions. And, like them, we are invited into this mystery — this triumph that seems absurd, frankly. This completely illogical empty tomb. And whether we are Mary or the disciples or Thomas, we are called to see him as the Risen One, my Lord and my God we proclaim with them.

May it be so

\